

Hughes (C.H.)

[Reprint from THE ALIENIST AND NEUROLOGIST, Jan., 1885.]

Borderland Psychiatric Records, Continued.

PSYCHICAL CONCUSSION AND PERVERSION OF THE SELF-SENSE—ABERRATIONS OF SENSATION ASSOCIATED WITH PROBABLE LESION OF THE SYMPATHETIC SYSTEM.

BY THE EDITOR.

THAT there is a self-sense the writer is prepared, if the statement is gainsaid, to prove at another time, but not now. That sensory nervous filaments are associated with the ganglionic system in various parts of the body the reader as well as the writer are aware, and that there is a psychical concussion in which the intellectual area of the cerebral cortex shows the suffering of the sympathetic system, the melancholias of sudden shock, and other recognized forms of insanity prove, as well as the sudden insanity in somnic form and the post neural-algic mental aberration which have fallen under the writer's observations, but which lack of time forbids him to describe, abundantly prove.

The following description shows a state of nerve disturbance not altogether unfamiliar to the writer, but which he has not seen described. The case may be grouped with the Borderland Psychiatric Records published in THE ALIENIST AND NEUROLOGIST, for January, 1884:

December 27th, 1883.

DR. C. H. HUGHES—Dear Sir:—Four years ago and more, I endured a long siege of watching, nursing, anxiety and fatigue, succeeded by great and uncontrollable grief in the loss of my husband. In three or four days afterward I experienced a most sudden and violent change or revolution, a complete breaking up or giving way of the whole nervous system or inner man, and since that dark and sad hour I have never had a natural feeling or sensation. Everything is wrong, the whole sympathetic system



seems completely paralyzed. Every feeling and sensation that make life is completely annihilated. I have not even the common sensations of hunger, thirst, or any sensation whatever of sleep. All is gone, and every act of my life is now purely mechanical. I, of course, take food, and sometimes have a kind of sleep, but entirely devoid of sensation or desire, and therefore painfully mechanical. My mind calls up every act, thought, or word of the past, and most cruelly tortures me for every failure or imperfection. It would be perfectly impossible to describe my singularly strange and insupportably torturous mental condition. Oh! it is a living death—all this combined with the darkest and deepest melancholia, but oh! it is more—far more than melancholia. There is a most dreadful and continual singing noise in my head, as of ten thousand insects at a distance, and then another noise as though a popping was going on in my head, this is *not* continual. My bowels move, but the actions are unnatural, and possess little or no odor. My kidneys move right often and but little at a time, and that little seems full of strong salt, so much so, as to stiffen my linen like starch. Dr. S—— told me I had diabetes also. No medicines have ever seemed to have any effect. I am 49 years old, and had just entered upon a "change of life" when all of these troubles came upon me.

Mrs. C——

In a similar state of feeling, nine months later, the same patient wrote to the accomplished medical superintendent of one of our State hospitals for the insane, who kindly referred the letter to me for my opinion.

We here give the conclusion of the letter, the omitted pages being a repetition of the history already given:

Oh! I cannot tell you how I have borne it so long—this is the strangest part of it all when it seems utterly impossible to endure the moments as they come. Oh! I have wept and prayed and importuned my Heavenly Father to let kind death relieve me, but no answer comes and every day is but a repetition of the past, for nothing breaks the awful monotony. My tears are like rivers and my prayers are continual and importunate. There is the most startling horror on my soul, and when I would end my sufferings death startles me. Any death would be more welcome than this existence. Food nor sleep do

not seem to be essential to such an existence. When I take neither, I get along as well as when I have a little of each. I cannot engage in any of the duties or pleasures of life. I cannot have one moment's relief from my anguish, consequently cannot read, nor see, nor converse with a friend, nor with my own, dear, devoted children. There is a most terrible ringing and popping noise in my head; as of a thousand insects at a little distance. It never ceases for a moment, and a tremor is felt over the whole system. My trouble seems to originate in the head. My brain is so disturbed, and my head feels like a tight bandage was tied around it. When I lie down on the bed, I feel like I press it so hard, as though I would go through it.

Nothing has ever been done for me that has amounted to anything. Many suggestions have been made, but to no good. We have done the best we could and all we knew, but nothing has had any effect. The food I take does not seem to be taken up by the system, nor does it assimilate, nor so much as have odor.

I write to you for advice and council, for I am growing very feeble. Have you ever treated such a case? And do they ever yield to treatment? Can I ever hope to be natural again? Could you do anything for me, and if so, what would it cost me? Please let me have your best counsel and advice, and let me hear immediately. I have a large circle of friends and acquaintances and can give you references.

Mrs. C—

This patient should be under the care of a well regulated asylum, or in the hands of a physician in whom psychical influence and skill are so blended as to reinspire her with confidence and hope, and direct her mind from morbid introspection and foreboding. Her present home and surroundings are not the proper place for her. General practitioners who try to treat such cases as these at their own homes, will have only failure for their pains. In intensified form they are quite familiar to insane asylum physicians, and the best term by which to designate them is psychical concussion and sensory aberration.

